

The notion of continuity in Parmenides¹

1. Introduction:

Being *suneches*, being continuous, is a central notion in Aristotle's *Physics*, and of crucial importance for understanding time, space, and motion within Aristotle's framework. In this paper I want to show that continuity is, however, already of crucial philosophical significance in Parmenides, who seems to be the first thinker in the West to use the notion of continuity in a philosophically interesting and systematic way. But Parmenides uses it in a way that is importantly different from Aristotle with opposing implications.

The notion of *suneches* itself has not attracted much attention from Parmenides scholars (even though the passages in which Parmenides talks about *suneches* have, and their understanding is highly disputed).² What I will do in this paper is to look first in some detail at the three passages in fragment 8 of Parmenides' poem that are of crucial importance for Parmenides' notion of being *suneches* before comparing it briefly to Aristotle's notion. An analysis of these three passages in Parmenides will show that *suneches* for Parmenides implies complete homogeneity and indivisibility. The three passages I look at are (1) fragment 8, lines 5-6a, where Parmenides calls what is (*eon*) "*suneches*" for the first time and links being *suneches* and being *homou* ('being together'). (2) Lines 22-25 show being *suneches* to exclude differences in kind as well as any more or less. (3) Lines 42-49, finally, even though not using the word "*suneches*", can be understood as taking up the discussion of conditions that would prevent *eon* from being *suneches* and as systematizing these conditions. The argument of this passage shows that what would prevent *eon* from being *suneches* is either non-Being or unequally distributed Being.

The analysis of these three passages will be the basis for explaining why *suneches* is understood very differently in Parmenides' poem and Aristotle's *Physics*. I want to argue that these differences can ultimately be traced back to different starting points and to different understandings of what we would call the principle of sufficient reason.

Being *suneches* literally means "holding together". One of the questions discussed in the literature is how this holding together can be understood – whether things are temporally

¹ Alexander Mourelatos seems to me to be a rare combination of the virtues of a terrific scholar with extreme modesty, fairness, kindness, and *Lebensfreude*. An expression of this combination I already encountered when I first met Alex at a conference on Plato's *Timaeus* that Richard Mohr, Kirk Sanders and I had organized at the University of Urbana-Champaign in 2007. There Alex not only gave a wonderfully subtle paper on the *eikōs mythos*, but he also made sure that young scholars got good treatment and loosened up the conference atmosphere in the most enchanting way with his after dinner singing performance. Furthermore, it seems to me that the field of Parmenides Studies in the Anglophone world of today cannot be thought of without his highly influential book, *The Route of Parmenides* – while not all of us may agree on Alex's interpretation, none of us can write on Parmenides without consulting it. It is a pleasure to dedicate this paper to him.

² Part of the problem here is that by looking at these passages we immediately get dragged into questions about the structure of the whole poem.

uninterrupted, spatially connected, or ontologically holding together. In the context where *suneches* first appears in Parmenides it seems to indicate temporal continuity (being uninterrupted), but will see that in the following passages other senses seem to be at play as well.

2. Parmenides's notion of being *suneches*:

In Greek writing before Parmenides, the word “*suneches*” refers mainly to uninterrupted activity. For example, in *Iliad* XII, lines 25-26 we find the claim that “Zeus rained ever continually” (ἴε δ' ἄρα Ζεὺς συνεχές); in *Odyssey* IX, line 74-75 Odysseus tells us about himself and his men that “there for two nights and two days continuously we lay, eating our hearts for weariness and sorrow” (ἐνθα δύο νύκτας δύο τ' ἡματα συνεχές αἰεὶ κείμεθ', ὁμοῦ καμάτῳ τε καὶ ἄλγεσι θυμὸν ἔδοντες); and in Hesiod, *Theogony* 635-636, we hear that when the Titans were fighting against the Olympic gods “they, with bitter wrath, were fighting continually with one another at that time for ten full years” (οἳ ῥα τότε ἀλλήλοισι χόλον θυμαλγέ' ἔχοντες συνεχέως ἐμάχοντο δέκα πλείους ἐνιαυτούς). By indicating uninterrupted activity, being *suneches* also implies a certain temporal extension (two days or ten years) during which this activity takes place.

With Parmenides, however, the understanding of being *suneches* is transferred from the realm of activity to what we may want to call the ontological realm: Parmenides understands being *suneches* as a characteristic of what truly is, *to eon*, which has nothing to do with any kind of activity and of which Parmenides explicitly claims that it is *akineton*, unmovable or unmoved. For Parmenides, being *suneches* implies absolute homogeneity and indivisibility, as the following three passages from fragment 8 make clear.

Passage I:

In fragment 8, line 6, Parmenides calls what is, *eon*, for the first time *suneches*:

οὐδέ ποτ' ἦν οὐδ' ἔσται, ἐπεὶ νῦν ἔστιν ὁμοῦ πᾶν,
ἔν, συνεχές

neither was it nor will it be, since it is now all together, one, continuous³ (fr. 8, 5-6a).

³ Hermann Diels, *Parmenides Lehrgedicht*, Berlin 1897, p. 37 translates “συνεχές” as “unteilbar”, thus anticipating already the explanation of συνεχές that follows later; and also David Gallop, *Parmenides of Elea, Fragments, A text and translation with an introduction*, Toronto 1984, translates it as indivisible (p. 62). “ὁμοῦ πᾶν” is usually translated as “all together”, for example, by Leonardo Tarán, *Parmenides, A text with translation, commentary, and critical essays*, Princeton 1965, A.H. Coxon (2009), *The fragments of Parmenides, A Critical text with Introduction and Translation, the Ancient Testimonia and a Commentary*, revised and expanded edition, Las Vegas 2009, and Gallop (1984). One point to note with this translation is that “all” may suggest that we are dealing with a number of things, while translating πᾶν as “whole” would indicate dealing only with one thing, see also LSJ. Accordingly, talking about a whole would suits the line following better, which talks about *eon* being *hen*, thus seeming to assume one thing. I am stick to translating πᾶν as “all” here nevertheless, since being a whole qua *oulon* is discussed separately by Parmenides a few lines later on. I will, however, refer to both translations below as we should keep both possibilities on the table when we discuss

Being “now all together, one, continuous” is named as the reason why “was” and “will be” cannot be truly said of Parmenides’ Being. What was and will be seem to be the things belonging to what the mortals assume on their way of *doxa*, as well as what we deal with in our everyday world. These things are spread out temporally, they are extended in time: they were there in (some part of) the past and will be there in (some part of) the future. The temporal realm of the world of becoming is divided into was and will be. By contrast, what truly is, is not subject to these temporal differences, at least not in the same way. Why not? Because it is “now all together”. ἐπει, *because* – given that temporal differences are exactly what is under dispute, it seems clear that ἐπεὶ cannot be understood in a temporal sense, but should rather be taken as indicating a causal or explanatory relation. *Eon* is *now* – this can be understood either as indicating atemporality, being beyond time;⁴ or as indicating some present that we can never address as past or future.⁵ In both cases, “now” cannot be temporally extended if it is to be strictly distinguished from was and will be, otherwise there will be a time when it would be right to say of it that it was and that it will be.⁶

the meaning of the whole line (and I do not think we should yet presuppose for Parmenides the discussion about the distinction between *pan* and *holon* we find in *Theaetetus* 204aff.)

⁴ So G.L.E. Owen, “Plato and Parmenides on the Timeless Present”, in: *The Monist* vol. 50 (1966), pp. 317-340; similarly Alexander Mourelatos, *The Route of Parmenides, Revised and Expanded Edition*, Las Vegas 2008, pp. 105-107. On this understanding it finds a famous echo in Plato’s *Timaeus*.

⁵ So perhaps Eduard Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung* Erster Teil, erste Abteilung, Leipzig 1919, p. 690 and Coxon (2009) p. 196 who understands it as “total coexistence in the present”. And it needs to be a present that has not come into being nor will pass away, since Parmenides argues against generation for the *alētheia* path.

⁶ Finally, some scholars have also read it as indicating eternal temporal duration – Tarán (1965), p. 179 argues for this third possibility, similarly also John Palmer, *Parmenides and Presocratic Philosophy*, Oxford 2009, and Gallop (1984), p. 15; cf. also Hermann Fränkel (1955), *Wege und Formen frühgriechischen Denkens*, ed. by in F. Tietze, Munich, p. 191, n.1 where he understands fr. 8, 5 as follows: “und es gibt nicht ein Sein das nur während irgend einer vergangenen Zeit bestand oder erst in irgendeiner zukünftigen bestehen wird, weil jetzt alles Sein insgesamt besteht als ein einziges Kontinuum“, and Malcolm Schofield, “Did Parmenides discover eternity?”, in: *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte der Philosophie* 52, 1970. According to this reading “neither was it nor will it be, since it is now” should be read as a denial that Being ever was in the sense of having perished and that Being ever will be in the sense of it is yet to be born. However, this reading does not seem to be a very natural reading of the Greek as it requires a lot of background assumptions to read it this way for which the reader has no preparation at this point in the poem – how should the reader when encountering line 5 get to the assumption that “neither was it” should be read as “it never was in the sense of having perished”? Where should this additional information come from? And endless duration would have been much more easily expressed as “it is, and always (*aei*) was, and always will be” than by excluding “was” and “will be”. “Neither was it nor will it be” can only be read as expressing endless duration if one is already set to derive it from these lines. Tarán’s reading, on which I will concentrate as a representative reading of this line of interpretation in the following, seems to be supported by line 20, which states that “if it came to be, it is not, nor if it is going to be some time in the future”. However, line 20 seems to me to have a task that is not directly related to line 5. In line 20 we get the last of three points arguing against coming into being and passing away: the first one showed that what is cannot come into being either out of what is not nor of what is, the second makes it clear that there is no sufficient reason for something to come into being at any particular time, and the third step here claims that that which itself comes into being would not be now if it came into being or ever will come into being (for a discussion of line 20 cf. Mourelatos (2008) pp. 102-103). But without the supplement of line 20 for the reading of line 5, it is hard to see how line 5 could express endless duration at all. Tarán’s claim that the characterisation of Being as without beginning and end (it is *anarchon* and *apauston*) in lines 26-28 necessarily implies duration and thus is “definite evidence” that he did not eliminate duration (p. 180), seems simply false to me – if I want to give an account of something atemporal I may very well use expressions like “being without beginning and end” for it. And Tarán’s argument against the atemporality reading presupposes the correctness of his own

Moreover, *eon* is *all/a whole together* – “being all/a whole together” combines two basic features: it is all/a whole (πᾶν), which seems to be taken up by calling it “one”, and it is together (ὁμοῦ), which seems to be taken up by calling it “continuous”. “Being all/a whole together” is named as a reason why *eon* neither was nor will be; so it is meant to explain why *eon* cannot be subject to or allow for temporal extension and thus for temporal differences. Accordingly, “being all/ a whole together” denies any temporal extension – for *eon* the extensions of time, “was” and “will be”, is all together in the now.⁷

On my reading of the first passage, Parmenides denies that *eon* is temporally extended; it is continuous in the sense of not allowing for any temporal differences, like ‘was’ and ‘will be’. Being “together” and “continuous” thus seem to exclude any temporal differences;⁸ but the following passages will give us a fuller picture of what these two notions amount to.

Passage II:

The second passage demonstrates that for Parmenides, being *suneches* excludes not only temporal differences, but, as I want to show, also other kinds of differences:

οὐδέ διαίρετόν ἐστιν, ἐπεὶ πᾶν ἐστιν ὁμοῖον
οὐδέ τι τῇ μᾶλλον, τό κεν εἴργοι μιν συνέχεσθαι,
οὐδέ τι χειρότερον, πᾶν δ' ἔμπλεόν ἐστιν ἔοντος.
τῷ ξυνεχὲς πᾶν ἐστιν· ἐὼν γὰρ ἔοντι πελάζει

(1) And it is not divisible since it is all homogeneous.⁹

reading when he claims that we could only derive atemporality from this passage if Parmenides was aware of the connection between time and processes, but he was not aware of this connection, which “is shown by the fact that he did not eliminate duration”. Tarán’s reading would still allow for claiming that Being was (in the sense of it having existed before) and will be (in the sense of it continuing its existence in the future), and thus would still allow for temporal differences and, with difference, for some form of non-Being. While I understand this passage as claiming *eon* to be beyond temporal differences, all that is required for the following account is that there are no temporal differences.

⁷ This thought has probably found its most famous development in Boethius. Translating πᾶν as ‘whole’, as, for example, Uvo Hölscher, *Parmenides, Vom Wesen des Seienden*, Frankfurt (Main) 1986, *ad locum* does, seems to connect our understanding of *eon* more explicitly to oneness, while translating it as ‘all’ makes the exclusion of temporal extension clearer.

⁸ Hölscher (1986), *ad locum* (p. 90) understands *suneches* here as spatial continuity; the reason for this seems to be that he understands the *nun* as indicating temporal unity, and then *suneches* as the corresponding spatial one. Conche understands *suneches* as expressing “qu’il ne fait qu’un avec lui-même” (that it is one with itself).

⁹ “πᾶν ἐστιν ὁμοῖον” is often translated as “being all alike”. Gallop (1984) p. 16 takes “alike” adverbially and translates “[it] all alike is” to indicate that “the subject exists alike at every point: there are no gaps in which it ‘is not’”. And he sees a similar thought expressed in fragment 4. Also Owen (1960), pp. 92–93 and Schofield (1970) p. 117 read “ὁμοῖον” adverbially, as “it all exists alike”. Mourelatos (2008) p. 11 n. 30 argues against understanding ὁμοῖον adverbially by pointing out that the “adjectival sense of ‘alike’ or ‘same’ or ‘equal’ for ὁμοῖον [...] is guaranteed by the occurrence, four lines below, of the sentence ἐὼν γὰρ ἔοντι πελάζει, an obvious echo of the Homeric proverb, αἰεὶ τὸν ὁμοῖον ἄγει θεὸς ὡς τὸν ὁμοῖον, ‘god always leads like to like’ (Od. 17.218: quoted by Plato in *Lys.* 214a; cf. also *Symp.* 195b)”. οὐδέ διαίρετόν could either mean ‘not divisible’ or ‘not divided’. Since Parmenides seems to deduce necessary features of *eon* in fragment 8, it does not just happen not to be divided, and thus “not divisible” seems to be the more natural translation.

(2) Nor is it more anywhere (or at any point), which would prevent it from being one continuous, nor less, but it is as a whole full of being.

(3) Through that it is all continuous, for Being is in contact with¹⁰ Being (fr. 8, lines 22-25).

The first step in this argument claims Parmenides' Being to be all homogeneous (*ὁμοῖον*) and that this implies it not being divisible. The second step rules out a condition that would prevent it from being continuous, namely, being more or less; instead it is as a whole full of being, which seems to mean equally full, neither more or less. The third step, "Being is in contact with Being", points out that all of Being is connected, and so, presumably, there is nothing in between anywhere that is not Being, which would undermine the homogeneity of *eon*.

The understanding of this second passage depends in part on how we understand the overall function of this passage in the poem – whether it is read as part of the deduction that *eon* does not undergo generation and corruption, or it is seen as a deduction of line 5-6a, our first passage,¹¹ or as the deduction that *eon* is *oulon*. Furthermore, it has to be clarified whether the continuity referred to in this passage should be understood in a spatial, temporal, ontological, or some other sense. And we need to explicate the relationship between being continuous and being homogenous.

Let us start from (3) "Through that it is all continuous". This formulation makes it clear that it is meant to be read as a conclusion – what precedes thus should explain why *eon* is all continuous. The following "Being is in contact with Being" either is a summary or reformulation of (1) - (2), or, as it sometimes seems to be the case in Parmenides' poem, an additional reason that is only provided after the conclusion.

So what are the features in (1) and (2) that should guarantee that *eon* is *suneches*? The features we are given are that it is not divisible, it is all homogeneous, it is not more anywhere nor less, it is as a whole full of being. The exact relationship between these features allows at least for two different readings: (A) it is homogenous and thus indivisible; in addition, it is full of Being and thus not more or less. (B) It is full of Being and thus not more or less, and it is homogenous – because of

¹⁰ I understand *πελάζει* in a figurative sense here to avoid restricting it to a physical context, cf. also Richard McKirahan, "Signs and Arguments in Parmenides B8", in: Patricia Curd and Daniel Graham, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Presocratic Philosophy*, Oxford 2008. Understood literally, it would also have the consequence of assuming more than one Being or more than one part of Being, since there have to be at least two Beings or parts of Being for there to be one close to another one. Mourelatos (2008) p. 111 translates these lines as "what-is consorts with what is".

¹¹ If it is seen as the deduction of lines 5-6a, then it should also be connected with the thought expressed there – with the exclusion of temporal differences. Cf. also Schofield (1970) pp. 118-119. For Gallop p. 16 understanding *suneches* in passage II as picking up the same word from passage I would be a reason for understanding *suneches* as "at least including temporal continuity", while what I call passage III would then "transfer the reasoning from a temporal to a spatial context" (p. 17). However, he thinks that the current, second passage reads more naturally as spatial, and would then, as a spatial plenum, also contribute to "the subject' being completely 'chained up', which follows immediately".

all this it is indivisible.¹² For our purposes it does not matter so much whether we go for reading (A) or (B), what is important is that being *suneches* includes all these features – being homogenous, indivisible, full of Being, and not more or less. Similarly with the second part of (3) “Being is in contact with Being”: for our purposes what is important is that it is implied by being *suneches* – whether it is a reformulation of something preceding (if so, presumably a reformulation of being homogenous and/or full of Being¹³) or introduces some additional reason (for example, pointing out that it is not only full with Being but that there are also no gaps within Being).

If we now look at the relationship between being homogeneous and being continuous, it seems clear that being homogenous is a weaker notion so that for something to be *suneches* means being *homoion* plus fulfilling some further criteria. The Greek word ὁμοῖον basically means “being like something” or “being of the same kind”¹⁴ (accordingly, this is one feature that could suggest that the current passage is the beginning of the deduction proving the *sêma* that Being is whole and of only one kind (*oulon mounogenes*)¹⁵ from the beginning of fragment 8).¹⁶ Being *homoion* here may be understood as being one with respect to kind¹⁷ – Being is not divisible into different kinds. If understood in this way, claiming *eon* to be *homoion* would still leave the possibility of other differences, differences internal to *eon* that cannot be distinguished according to kind and genus but according to what we would understand as quantity or quality (including temporal and spatial ones), and perhaps also what Gallop understands as different degrees of Being. At least some of these possibilities are then excluded with the following lines: there is no more or less that would prevent Being from being continuous. “More or less” is not referring to indivisibility according to kind and

¹² In this second alternative the force of the “ἐπει” is seen to govern not only what follows in line 22, but also line 23 and 24. Support for this reading may be seen to come from Coxon (2009), for whom being *suneches* just “reformulates positively the initial statement οὐδὲ διαίρετόν ἐστιν” (p. 325, i.e. p.204 in the first edition).

¹³ Coxon (2009), for example, understands it as a paraphrase of “it is all full of Being” (p. 325, i.e. p.204 in the first edition).

¹⁴ Cf. Wilhelm Pape, *Altgriechisches Wörterbuch*, Berlin 1880. Aristotle in his *Categories* 11a 15f. restricts it to qualities.

¹⁵ With “*oulon mounogenes*” I follow the reading of Simplicius, while Pseudo-Plutarch reads “*mounon mounogenes*” (“it is singly of one kind”) and Proclus reads “*oulomeles*” (“being one/the whole limb”). Burnet (1930) and Untersteiner (1958) argue against the reading “*oulon mounogenes*”, since they take it to mean “only-begotten” as in Plato’s *Timaeus* 31b (where this presumably implies that I has come into being, as Plato’s one universe has come into being). However, as Tarán (1965), p. 92 already showed, it can also be understood as ‘unique’ or ‘single’ or ‘the only thing of its kind’. Cf. also McKirahan (2008), p. 221 for interpreting *mounogenes* as ‘unique’ rather than ‘uniform’.

¹⁶ So also, for example, Mourelatos (2008) pp. 113-114 and 131, Diels (1897), p. 80, and Tarán (1965); Schofield (1970) p. 119, however, sees it as a proof for lines 5-6a.

¹⁷ Coxon (2009) p. 324 (p. 204 in the first edition) claims that the “adjective *homoion* excludes differences of any kind, in particular (as in Melissus fr. 7 and 8) temporal variation” – without, however, giving any reason for this understanding.

genus, but rather seems to refer to some other respects, some other feature or quality,¹⁸ that would allow for difference and thus for divisibility.¹⁹

If we now move on to the question whether the continuity introduced here relates to some particular realm, we find that there is no consensus in the secondary literature; being *suneches* has been understood in a temporal, spatial, and ontological sense.²⁰ Understood temporally, it seems to take up passage I, and would make most sense if understood as a deduction of lines 5-6a.²¹ The problem with a temporal understanding to my mind lies in the fact that the temporal differences we encountered in passage I were completely different from differences of “more nor less”; they were differences of tense, “was” and “will be”, so it would be strange if these differences were now taken up by “more or less”.

A spatial understanding of *suneches* may be suggested by Parmenides’ talk about “Being is in contact with Being”.²² This, however, presupposes that *eon* is understood in a material sense or at least in a sense that it is spatially extended.²³ Tarán p. 106-108 claims that the indivisibility discussed here should not be understood as referring to material division, but as an ontological predicate of what exists; accordingly, for him continuity should not be understood as spatial but as ontological. Some at least weak ontological sense can be derived from the mere fact that being *suneches* is introduced as a *sêma* of *eon* (fragment 8, line 6a). For Tarán ontological continuity means – he follows Cherniss in this respect – “equal intensity of Being always and everywhere”.²⁴ Finally, being *suneches* may also

¹⁸ I will say more about how to understand “no more or less” when discussing passage III, which takes up being no more or less and adds “no smaller or larger”. There it should also become clear why I see it as indicating some quality, rather than some quantity.

¹⁹ Stephen Makin, *Indifference Arguments*, Oxford 1993, pp. 29ff understands what I take to be a second step as spelling out the first step. For him “no more here and less there” is a gloss on “homogenous” and “all continuous” is taken as equivalent to “not divided”. The argument in lines 22-25 then is meant to explicate the move from “homogenous” to “not divided” for Makin: if *eon* were more here and less there then there would be differences of being and it would not hold together.

²⁰ Cf., for example, Gallop (1984), p. 16-17: “It is hard to decide whether the continuum proved here is spatial or temporal or both”. One question to be asked here, however, is whether temporal and spatial interpretations of this passage may figure so prominently in the secondary literature, since we are used to understanding continuity as primarily temporal or spatial (or as applying to motion) from Aristotle.

²¹ Owen, *Eleatic Questions* (1960), p. 96-97 understood it temporally, which is criticised, e.g., by Guthrie, *History of Greek Philosophy. Volume II* (1965), and Schofield (1970), pp. 129-132. Others understood it as temporal among other things, so Zeller (1919) p. 690, n.1; and Coxon (2009) who claims on p. 325 (p.204 in the first edition) that Parmenides is “denying the divisibility of Being in the most general sense, spatially, temporally as well as otherwise”. We will see, however, that we are not yet dealing with the most general sense, since the third passage brings in a new aspect that is not yet explicitly there in the passage under discussion.

²² For a spatial understanding cf., for example, Zeller (1919) p. 690, n.1, Schofield (1970) p. 134 and also Coxon (2009), who thinks it would thus read most naturally.

²³ I have argued against such an understanding of *eon* in Barbara Sattler, “Parmenides’ System – the Logical Origins of his Monism”, in: *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 2009/2010, Leiden/Boston 2011.

²⁴ Tarán p. 108, cf. also Harold Cherniss, “Aristotle’s criticism of Presocratic philosophy”, Baltimore 1935, pp. 65-66, and Coxon (2009) p.324: “The premise that Being is all ὁμοῖον [‘alike’] summarises the succeeding assertions that there are no degrees of being (which follows from that in l. 11 that it must either be altogether or not be at all) and that it is all full of Being”. Tarán, however, brings in spatial and temporal continuity with the help of the modifiers “always” and “everywhere”.

be understood logically, in the sense that Coxon (2009) introduces, as “maintaining that it is one and indivisible in spite of the plurality of terms predicated of it.”²⁵

For the time being, I will leave it at suggesting that *suneches* not only implies indivisibility in kind and genus, but also excludes some kind of qualitative or quantitative differences (be they temporal, spatial, ontological, or logical) and suggest moving on to passage III before making any further interpretative decisions. Passage III not only denies any more and less (as passage II does), and ties it to unviolated Being, but also brings in the denial of *eon* being larger or smaller. I will try to show that it is helpful to understand ‘more or less’ as indicating qualitative differences, and ‘larger and smaller’ as referring to quantitative differences.

Passage III:

The third passage, even if it does not use the word *suneches*, can be understood as taking up the discussion of conditions that would prevent *eon* from being *suneches* and as systematizing them:

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ πεῖρας πύματον, τετελεσμένον ἐστί
 πάντοθεν, εὐκύκλου σφαίρης ἐναλίγκιον ὄγκῳ,
 μεσσοῦθεν ἰσοπαλὲς πάντῃ· τὸ γὰρ οὔτε τι μείζον
 οὔτε τι βαιότερον πελέναι χρεόν ἐστι τῇ ἢ τῇ.
 οὔτε γὰρ οὐκ ἐὼν ἔστι, τό κεν παύοι μιν ἱκνεῖσθαι
 εἰς ὁμόν, οὔτ' ἐὼν ἔστιν ὅπως εἴη κεν ἐόντος
 τῇ μᾶλλον τῇ δ' ἥσσον²⁶, ἔτεϊ πᾶν ἐστιν ἄσυλον·
 οἱ γὰρ πάντοθεν ἴσον ὁμῶς ἐν πείρασι κύρει

Since there is a final limit it is everywhere complete, like the mass of a well-rounded sphere,²⁷ equally balanced everywhere from the centre. For it is necessary that it is not any larger or smaller here or there, since there is no non-Being that would prevent it from attaining being homogenous; and it is not being in a way that there would be here more there less of Being, since it is as a whole inviolate. For being everywhere equal to itself, it is present equally (ὁμῶς) within its limits (fr. 8, 42-49).²⁸

²⁵ On pp. 325-326 (pp. 204-205 in the first edition). This is also how Coxon (2009) seems to understand Aristotle in *Metaphysics* 986b18-987a2 claiming that Aristotle there admits that “P.’s argument that Being is indivisible is not intended quantitatively so much as logically”.

²⁶ While “more” translates “mallon” here as well as in passage II, “less” translates “ἔσσον” here, but “cheiroteton” in passage II. Coxon (2009) p. 324 (p. 204 in the first edition) claims that “in writing here [in our passage II] inferior (*cheiroteton*) rather than simply ‘less’ (*hēsson*) P. anticipates by implication his later characterisation of Being as *tetelesmenon*”. However, since the argument here in passage III is explicitly concerned with the completeness of Being, I cannot see that Parmenides’ switch from *cheiroteton* to *ēsson* marks any difference in thought.

²⁷ I will not be able to get into a discussion here about the simile of a sphere that Parmenides uses to express completeness and homogeneity. I just want to stress that Parmenides uses a *simile* here – he talks about *eon* being *like* (ἐναλίγκιον) a sphere – he is not claiming that *eon* is a sphere, which would also have suggested *eon* being something physical or material.

²⁸ Geoffrey Kirk, John Raven, and Malcolm Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers, a critical history with a selection of texts*, Cambridge 1983 [KRS], pp. 252-254 take lines 32-49 as one section showing the perfection of Being; on their reconstruction, the main argument should be understood as “what is, if limited or determinate, cannot be deficient, and if not deficient, cannot be imperfect”. By contrast, Guido Calogero, (1936) ‘Parmenide

The main aim of argumentation here is not the continuity of *eon*, but its completeness. The argument as a whole aims to establish that Being is complete with the help of three steps. Steps two and three can nevertheless be understood as giving an account of what it means to be continuous, which seems to be a necessary condition for completeness, while the first step is specific for demonstrating completeness. This first step is given right at the beginning, while the other two follow the conclusion that it is everywhere complete. The second and the third step can be understood in two ways: either I. they are two reasons why Being cannot be larger or smaller (the first reason is that there is no non-Being, the second that Being is no more or less as it is inviolate); or II. we get one reason why Being is not larger or smaller (because there is no non-Being) and one reason why Being is not more or less (because Being is inviolate, unharmed, intact). I follow the second interpretation²⁹ and read the main premises as follows:

- (1) There is a final limit.
- (2) There is no non-Being, hence Being cannot be larger or smaller.
- (3) Being is as a whole inviolate, hence it is not more or less.

Conclusion: Being is everywhere complete.

The main claims of (1) – (3) have been established earlier in Parmenides’ poem and therefore can be used here as premises with which the reader is already familiar: Premise 1 had been introduced in lines 26 and 29ff.³⁰ Premise 3 seems to take up the argument from passage 2 – either putting the reason for *eon* to be no more or less simply in new wording³¹ or by introducing a new reason for there to be no more or less of Being (these are the two possibilities as to how we can read that Being is no more or less since it is ἄσυλον, inviolate – as rephrasing “being full of being” from passage II, or as new support for Being not to be more or less). The main claim from Premise 2, that there is no non-Being, is already familiar from fragment 2, even if so far it had not been connected with not being larger or smaller or being continuous.

Premises (2) and (3) can be read as systematizing the conditions that would prevent Being from being continuous: what would prevent *eon* from being continuous by introducing some form of differences may either be non-Being or “violated” Being. Non-Being would lead to *eon* being larger or smaller here or there (premise (2)); Parmenides does not give an explanation for this inference, but

e la genesi della logica classica’, *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Classe di lettere e filosofia*, ser. 2/5, p. 177, n. 2; Theodor Ebert, “Wo beginnt der Weg der Doxa? Eine Textumstellung im Fragment 8 des Parmenides”, in: *Phronesis*, 34 (1989), pp. 123ff.; and John Palmer (2009), pp. 352-3 argue that lines 34-31 originally came after lines 53, and that thus line 42 should be read as immediately following line 33. It seems to me that this proposal for the rearrangement of the text gives a more coherent argument and thus sounds plausible. However, my analysis should not depend on whether the reader accepts this suggestion to rearrange the text or not.

²⁹ KRS (1983), Hölscher (1986), and Daniel Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, Cambridge 2010 seem to follow the first alternative, while Jaap Mansfeld and Olivier Primavesi, *Die Vorsokratiker*, Stuttgart 2012 leave it open in their translation.

³⁰ Line 26 claims that *eon* “is motionless in the limits of great bonds” and lines 29ff that “it remains steadfast, since mighty necessity holds it in the bonds of a limit, which confines it round about”.

³¹ So, for example, Coxon (2009) *ad locum* who takes this part to echo line 22.

the thought seems to be that non-Being would increase and decrease Being thus making it smaller or larger by being included within Being. “Violate” Being would lead to more or less Being (premise (3)); probably because any “injury” of *eon* would lead to less Being in that “respect” in which the injury occurred³² while the remainder of Being, i.e., Being in so far as it is inviolate, would then be more in comparison to the violated respect, and so we would get an unequally distributed Being. But since there is no non-Being (as shown in fragments 2, 6, 7) and not more of Being here and less there (as discussed in fragment 8, lines 22-25), the continuity of Being as a whole is granted. ‘More or less’ was already introduced in passage II, while ‘larger or smaller’ seems to introduce a new reason why somebody may think that Being is not continuous.

While larger and smaller (*meizon* and *baioteron*) may seem to suggest quantitative difference here – it is what we would call quantities that are larger or smaller – more or less (*mallon* and *hêsson/cheiroteton*) could also cover qualitative differences (for example, more or less hotness, blueness, etc.). Given that Parmenides seems to employ larger and smaller on the one hand and more or less on the other hand for distinct kinds of differences, it seems plausible that he wants to rule out two very general kinds of differences here, what we would call quantitative as well as qualitative differences. Of course, it is not clear that Parmenides would have distinguished between quality and quantity in the way familiar to us, at least since Aristotle, but this does not necessarily imply that he would not go for excluding two general kinds of differences that we may capture as quantitative and qualitative, respectively. Parmenides does not seem to be interested in any specific quantitative and qualitative differences, but rather in ruling out quantitative and qualitative differences in general.

While the argument reconstructed so far with the help of premise 2 and 3 ensures the continuity of Being, it is not enough to support the *completeness* of Being. This requires, in addition, a final (*pumatôn*) limit (premise 1). Accordingly, the summary that rounds off this argument in line 49 takes up all features necessary to grant completeness: everywhere equal to itself, *eon* is present equally (an apparent reference to continuity, no differences in any respect) within its limits. Thus our passage can also be seen as echoing and in part further developing lines 29ff.: there the completeness of Being relies on a limit as well as on Being not lacking anything.³³ While the first condition, possessing a limit, is dealt with more extensively in lines 29ff., the second condition, not lacking in anything, can be understood as being spelt out further in our passage – there is no non-Being and Being is not violated.

³² While the language of “respects” may not seem to fit Parmenides’ ontology, I think of ‘respects’ here as referring to the different *sêmata* he introduces in fragment 8. For those who think of *eon* as being spatially extended, an “injury” of *eon* would lead to less Being *where eon* was injured.

³³ Line 33 claims that *eon* “is not lacking, if it were, it would be lacking in everything”; Primavesi and Mansfeld, however, understand the second clause as “es würde ihm an Ganzheit mangeln”.

Parmenides' introduction of a limit may be seen as a direct response to Anaximander's notion of an initial mass whose absolute homogeneity seems to imply also limitlessness (fragment 1).³⁴ In contrast to Anaximander, Parmenides cannot think of something homogeneous as infinite. The reason for this seems to be that if it is infinite, it is not fully determined, and thus the possibility is given that the aspect or part that is undetermined is not homogenous; whether something is indeed homogeneous is only settled in case this something is *fully* determined.³⁵

How then are we to understand the limit Parmenides is talking about? If Parmenides' *eon* is conceived as being spatial, being limited suggests that the thing is physically limited.³⁶ If we do not understand Parmenides' *eon* as being spatially extended (since this would imply at least spatial differences),³⁷ we may wonder whether the notion of being limited fits the Parmenidean framework at all. In this case the meaning of limit may be best captured as expressing some other form of being determined – Owen, for example, understands Parmenides' usage of *peras* here as “the mark of invariance”, of constancy.³⁸

Both understandings of a final limit, spatial as well as non-spatial, do not necessarily entail that something is limited by something else – it seems that for Parmenides there is no other thing apart from the one Being that could limit it. Thus the limit does not seem to be a constraint from outside, but rather to be self-imposed by Being (in a non-spatial sense this would suggest that Being is fully determined by itself, i.e., it does not need something outside to specify or characterise it).

Summing up the discussion from all three passages, it seems that being *suneches* for Parmenides rules out several kinds of differences: we saw that the first passage ruled out temporal differences. The second passage excluded any more or less, any qualitative differences, and the third passage, finally, also eliminated being larger and smaller, any quantitative differences. Furthermore, if the reader understands the simile of the sphere literally, then these passages also may suggest the explicit exclusion of spatial differences.

3. A brief comparison between Parmenides's and Aristotle's understanding of being *suneches*:

³⁴ Burnet, however, understood the discussion of more or less as a reference to the Pythagorean "air" or "void" which makes reality discontinuous.

³⁵ This understanding of a limit changed, however, with Melissus, who feels compelled to assume that what truly is is infinite.

³⁶ In this case the final limit can literally be understood as an outer limit, which is also suggested by lines 30ff: “it remains steadfast, since mighty necessity holds it in the bonds of a limit, which confines it all around” – a limit that confines something all around can be understood as an outer limit.

³⁷ For example, Gallop (1984) p. 20 claims that it does not make sense to take the sphere literally, since it would invite the question what lies beyond the limit and the goddess could hardly answer “nothing” given what she has said about non-being. Accordingly, for him having a furthest limit indicates being complete, perfect, or finished. A position that I argued for in my book manuscript *Natural Philosophy in Ancient Greece*, chapter 2 suggests that *eon* cannot be spatial, since what is spatial is extended and thus necessarily possesses differences – the difference between part of it being here, another part being there, etc. For the current paper it is, however, not important whether the reader shares this understanding of *eon* as not spatial or not.

³⁸ Owen (1960) p. 65.

With Aristotle, the focus in the discussion of *suneches* shifts back from the ontological realm to the realm of time and activity or change. It is, however, spatial magnitude that is presented as the paradigmatic continuous thing: in *Physics* IV, chapter 11 it is spatial magnitude that guarantees the continuity of change which in turn guarantees the continuity of motion and time.

In his understanding of what being *suneches* means, Aristotle does take up central points of Parmenides' understanding, for example, the formulation "Being *is in contact with* Being" is echoed by Aristotle's first characterization of the continuum in the *Physics* as "those things whose limits touch and are one" (227a11-12).³⁹ And also the centrality of a final limit in Parmenides is of great importance for Aristotle.⁴⁰ Accordingly, the fact that Parmenides' Being is called *suneches* may seem to show that Aristotle's continuous magnitudes are close to what Parmenides understand by *eon*. There is, however, a crucial difference between Parmenides' understanding of being *suneches* and Aristotle's: for Aristotle continuity implies *divisibility*, whereas for Parmenides *indivisibility* is the necessary result of continuity.⁴¹ Behind Parmenides' understanding seems to lie the assumption, as we will see below, that a division is possible only where there are differences – if something is divisible then it must be divisible by virtue of a difference within itself such that one part of it can be separated from the part from which it differs. But since for Parmenides what is *suneches* is homogenous in every respect, it is necessarily indivisible.⁴²

Both, Parmenides and Aristoteles, start from an understanding of that which is continuous as being homogenous and internally uniform. But, strikingly, they draw opposite inferences from the uniformity that continuity implies – Parmenides claims it to imply absolute indivisibility, whereas Aristotle assumes it to entail divisibility as one likes. One explanation for this difference can be found, it seems, in the different starting points of the two thinkers. Aristotle wants to establish a notion of continuity that is relevant to the realm of physics and thus starts with something spatially extended; accordingly, differences can be drawn simply from the fact that one part of what is spatially extended is here, while another is there (cf. *Physics* 231b4-6). Thus, it seems plausible to assume such continua to be divisible unless something speaks against their divisibility. Parmenides, by contrast, as I tried to show in another paper,⁴³ starts from *eon* as being consistently conceivable, which for him

³⁹ For a discussion of Aristotle's account of continuity see my book manuscript *Natural Philosophy in Ancient Greece*, chapter 7.

⁴⁰ However, Aristotle's notion of a final limit, in the sense of an outer limit, usually implies that there is something else outside (with the exception of the case of the world as a whole – a case that may thus resemble a spatial understanding of Parmenides' *eon*).

⁴¹ Coxon, in his original edition of Parmenides' poem seemed to deny any fundamental difference between Aristotle's and Parmenides' account of continuity when he writes on p. 204: "Apart from the single occurrence of *hen* (1.6), *ἕν* is P's only word for 'one' and must be given its Aristotelian sense of 'continuous'". Interestingly, in the edition revised by Richard McKirahan a "not" is supplied (it "must not be given its Aristotelian sense of 'continuous'"), without, however, this addition being pointed out.

⁴² Cf. also Makin (1993) on Zeno on this topic.

⁴³ Sattler (2011).

implies that it has no differences, since differences imply non-Being, which is unthinkable.⁴⁴ Given that *eon* does not possess any differences, there does not seem to be a reason (and for Parmenides there is no reason at all) for dividing this consistently thinkable uniform thing, and thus we cannot divide the thing.

A further important aspect is that in the reasoning just reconstructed, the two thinkers use the principle of sufficient reason at work in different ways here so that what counts as a sufficient reason for assuming divisibility differs. The standard formulation of the principle of sufficient reason requires for a thing *x*⁴⁵ that if *x* exists or it is reasonable to assume that *x* exists, then there is a sufficient reason for *x* or for assuming that *x* exists.⁴⁶ If we subscribe to such an understanding of the principle of sufficient reason, we may go along with Parmenides and claim that there is *no positive reason for* dividing what is homogeneous, since there is no difference anywhere; thus *to eon* is indivisible. By contrast, in the history of philosophy the principle of sufficient reason has also been invoked as demanding only that there is no reason speaking against something to exist or some state of affairs to obtain – if *x* exists or it is reasonable to assume that *x* exists, then there is no reason against the existence of *x* or against the assumption that *x* exists.⁴⁷ Assuming such an understanding, it seems appropriate to go along with Aristotle and claim that since there is *no reason speaking against* any division of continua, they are divisible in whatever way you like.

We saw in the second and third passage of Parmenides' poem discussed above that for Parmenides the lack of any difference shows that there is no sufficient (positive) reason for a division. This is also further supported by the striking use of anaphora in passage 2: lines 22-24 each start with οὐδέ – something is not the case – and from this we can then draw the conclusion in line 24 that τῷ ξυνεχῆς πᾶν, “through that it is a continuous whole”. So *eon* is a continuous whole because all the conditions named in the lines preceding, which would be reasons *for* possible divisions, do not hold. In this way the rhetorical structure of the poem emphasises that it is the lack of certain conditions – the lack of a sufficient reason for a division – that leads to continuity for Parmenides.

While for Aristotle there is no reason speaking against dividing what is continuous, for Parmenides there is no reason speaking for dividing what is continuous. Zeno's plurality paradoxes point out negative consequences the assumption of divisibility would lead to: assuming divisibility

⁴⁴ Cf. also Furley (1967), p. 57: “a thing must either *be* in a total sense, or not be. Then he picked up his conclusion; if it *is* in a total sense, then there can be no differentiation in it at all. There is nothing but total being everywhere. Thus a would-be divider can find nothing on which he can get a purchase. Wherever he considers what exists, it is all exactly the same.” This thought seems to have influenced also Plato's understanding of unity, e.g., in *Phaedo* 78c where we read that only what is composed of different things will fall apart, i.e., only where there are differences to start with will there be divisions.

⁴⁵ Or a state of affairs *s*.

⁴⁶ “*x* exists” is meant to be a metaphysical claim, while “it is reasonable to assume that *x* exists” is meant as an epistemic claim; the principle of sufficient reason can be understood either metaphysically or epistemically; cf. Makin (1993).

⁴⁷ This invoking of the principle of sufficient reason also relies on the principle of non-contradiction; for further discussion see my book manuscript *Natural Philosophy in Ancient Greece* chapter 1 and 7.

undermines a strong notion of unity⁴⁸ and the parts of such a division cannot be conceived in a consistent way.⁴⁹ In his discussion of continuity, Aristotle then attempts to show – in part explicitly, in part implicitly – that these negative consequences do not hold and that therefore there is no reason speaking against the divisibility of what is continuous;⁵⁰ what is continuous is divisible.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Lee fragment 1, Simplicius *Physics* 139.19-22.

⁴⁹ Lee fragment 2, Simplicius *Physics* 139.27 ff.

⁵⁰ This ultimately also seems to lead to a different understanding of the internal uniformity of what is *suneches* – for Aristotle this uniformity need not be assumed in all respects, see my book manuscript *Natural Philosophy in Ancient Greece* chapter 7.

⁵¹ I want to thank Michael Della Rocca for helpful comments on this paper.